DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 145 452 CS 203 666

AUTHOR Donlan, Dan
TITLE How to Involve Other Departments in Helping You Teach Writing.
PUB DATE Nov 76
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (66th, Chicago, November 25-27, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Composition Skills (Literary); *English Departments; *English Instruction; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Needs Assessment; Rating Scales; Secondary Education; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Responsibility; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that an English department that wishes to involve other departments in helping to improve students' writing skills must proceed through four distinct phases: (1) preparation of a rationale for involving other departments in the teaching of writing; (2) administration of a writing-attitude inventory to colleagues in other departments; (3) compilation of a needs assessment for each department that is willing to participate in an all-school writing program; and (4) development of an ongoing inservice education program for faculty members. The paper offers suggestions for dealing with these four areas and provides a sample writing-attitude inventory, a writing-attitude scale, sample departmental-needs assessment forms, and a list of suggested participants and goals for a writing committee. (GW)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

How to Involve Other Departments in Helping You Teach Writing*

(A Paper Presented at the 66th Annual Convention of NCTE, Chicago, Illinois)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dan Donlan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

Dan Donlan

University of California, Riverside

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED145452

If one were to eavesdrop on conversations held in teachers' lounges, one might hear something like this:

Jones: I just collected my first term paper assignment today.

Smith: I don't envy you. Now, you've got to read them all.

Jones: I hope I CAN read them. I just glanced through a few. You wouldn't believe the spelling and grammar. One kid spelled Washington with no capital and an h after the w.

Smith: You think that's bad. You should see what I get on the lab manuals -- at least from those students who bother to turn them in. They're suppose to record procedures. When I can finally read the handwriting, the sentences don't make any sense. What do you teach in that English department, Brown?

Brown: Not "how to fill in lab manual." That's for sure!

Jones: Seriously, Brown, aren't you guys suppose to be teaching writing? My kids have no idea what an English sentence looks like.

Brown: Yes they do. Look at these papers I'm correcting now. Sure, kids have spelling problems, but I think these original short stories are excellent.

Jones: Stories are one thing. Don't you teach term paper anymore?

Brown: We find that the analytical paper suits our needs better.

Jones: Well who's going to teach them the term paper manual? I don't have time. Teaching American history is all I've got time for. Writing is your job.

Dixon: Some of my guys out in the shop can't spell their own names right. That's the least you could do.

Smith: Yeah, you guys in the English department better shape up. Stop teaching so much poetry and story writing, and teach something that will help the kids -- and us.

*Appreciation expressed to Research Committee at the Univeristy of California for funding the research that forms a basis for this article: Intramural Research Grant # 5-533202-19000-7.

CS 203 666

It's not an uncommon experience for an English teacher to receive criticism about the communications skills problems occurring in other departments. The English teacher is frequently perceived by the Joneses, Smiths, and Dixons as being a service agent, not a teacher with content to teach as specific as that of history, mathematics, and science. As a result, when students experience difficulty in written expression, the English teacher is cited for dereliction of duty. Whereas Mr. Brown must assume primary responsibility for teaching his students how to write, he shouldn't be made to feel solely responsible when students cannot transfer writing skill to other academic areas.

However, it's not enough for Brown to tell Smith, Jones, and Dixon that he, Brown, teaches students how to write about literature and language, not American history, physics, or consumer mathematics. Brown's department should develop a strategy for dealing with writing problems that occur outside their sphere of influence. If they don't, no one will.

Trying to convince other departments that they should also be teaching writing can be hazardous to one's health. I remember barely escaping with my life as I was "inservicing" a junior high faculty on the subject "How to Teach Your Students to Write Better Reports." Whereas the English teachers in the audience were quite receptive, one science teacher refused to participate, and the social studies department got up and walk out. The rest stared alternately at the wall clock and at their wrist watches. Why? I had been presumptuous. I hadn't bothered to see whether they wanted to teach writing.

An English department wishing to establish an all-department writing program must proceed cautiously through four distinct pahses: (1) preparation

of a rationale, (2) administration of a writing attitude inventory, (3) compilation of a needs assessment, and (4) development of an ongoing inservice education program.

The Rationale

Why involve other departments in the teaching of writing? The same reason why other departments are involved in the teaching of reading. The reading teacher can teach students "how to read," but he can't teach all students to read textbooks in all academic areas. For instance, a reading teacher can't teach physics, but he can work with the physics teacher to make her textbook more readable. In the same way, the English teacher can teach students "how to write," but she can't teach all students to write proficiently in all academic areas. For example, an English teacher can't teach students how to write up a chemistry experiment, but she can work with the chemistry teacher to make his writing assignments more palatable to students and more evaluatable. In effect, just as the reading teacher consults with other departments about content reading, the English teacher can consult with other departments about content writing. Just as the content area teachers should assume some responsibility for making their textbooks readable to their students so should they assume additional responsibility for making their writing assignments performable.

The Attitude Inventory

Do other departments want to get involved in the teaching of writing? If the answer is categorically NO, an uphill battle ensues. The trick is to ask the question in such a way as to avoid the NO answer. English departments can administer "writing attitude inventories" to their colleagues department by department. The inventory can take a simple form, a few multiple

choice questions that can test the degree of commitment an individual teacher or a department has for the teaching of writing. Figure 1 contains such an attitude inventory. As indicated, individual scores can be tabulated and combined into departmental averages, then plotted on a writing attitude scale (See Figure 2). Out of a total 40 points, if the science department scores 34, social studies 25, and mathematics 10, the implication is that cooperation would be most forthcoming in science and least in mathematics.

The Needs Assessment

The attitude inventory provides clues as to which departments would be most willing to be involved in the teaching of writing. After making contact with these "willing" departments, English teachers may want to compile a needs assessment, based on what particular problems each department is experiencing with writing assignments. Figure 3 indicates a needs assessment conducted with three departments -- science, mathematics, and social studies. Items in the needs assessment can form the basis for an ongoing inservice education program.

Ongoing Inservice Education

Inservice education to develop a school-wide writing program is not a one-shot, 3 to 5 in the library session. First, a writing committee, made up of a few English teachers, a reading teacher, representatives from cooperative departments, the principal and a counselor, can be formed to plan, implement, and evaluate inservice programs (See Figure 4). Second, working from the needs assessments, the writing committee arranges for specific problem-solving sessions, led either by local faculty or outside consultants. Third, the writing committee prepares to test strategies and materials in the classroom to see if they are effective. An inservice education program of this nature might take several years to reach its goals.

Conclusion

Should you or your department be interested in developing an all-school writing program, the following materials might be of some use to you:

1. "Writing in the Content Areas: A Workshop"
   A step-by-step procedure for teaching students to write reports without copying.

2. "The English Teacher as a Writing Consultant to Other Departments"
   A series of writing guides an English teacher prepared to help science teachers assign, teach, and evaluate writing.

3. "Writing in the Content Areas: Generalizations from Research"
   Summaries from four studies conducted at the University of California, Riverside, under Intramural Research Grant # 5-533202-19000-7. Focus is on how teachers and textbooks assign writing in science, social studies, and mathematics.

These materials can be sent free to you. Just send a self-addressed stamped large manila envelope to:

Dan Donlan
School of Education
University of California
Riverside, CA 92502

FIGURE 1. Attitude Inventory

Content Area: Mathematics
Science
(circle one) Social Studies
English/Language Arts
Other

WRITING IN THE CONTENT AREAS

Attitude Inventory

Instructions: For each of the following statements, circle A if you agree with the statement, B if you tend mostly to agree, C if you tend mostly to disagree, and D if you definitely disagree.

		4	3	2	1
1.	In the subjects that I teach, it is vitally important that my students know how to write coherent sentences and paragraphs.	A	B	C	D
2.	It is reasonable for me to assume that students know to write coherent sentences and paragraphs when the enter my class for the first time.	D	C	B	A
3.	It is the prime responsibility of the English teacher, not the content area teacher, to teach writing acquisition (i.e., teach students basic skills in composition).	A	B	C	D
4.	It is the prime responsibility of the content area teacher, not the English teacher, to teach students how to write specific assignments: e.g., research papers, library reports, essay examinations.	A	B	C	D
5.	Essay examinations are a truer test of what a student knows than are objective tests.	A	B	C	D
6.	All student writing should be corrected for form (grammar, usage, punctuation, manuscript appearance) as well as for style and content.	A	B	C	D
7.	A letter grade and a terminal comment on a student paper can never replace an abundance of marginal comments dealing with a student's ideas and expression.	A	B	C	D
8.	If a student cannot write clearly, she or he cannot think clearly.	A	B	C	D
9.	If a student reads well, he or she can probably write well.	A	B	C	D
10.	Entire departments should, as a faculty, determine basic goals in writing programs and facilitate the reaching of these goals.	A	B	C	D

NOTE: To arrive at a total score, multiply the number of circles by the number at the top of each column. Highest score is 40.

FIGURE 2. Writing Attitude Scale

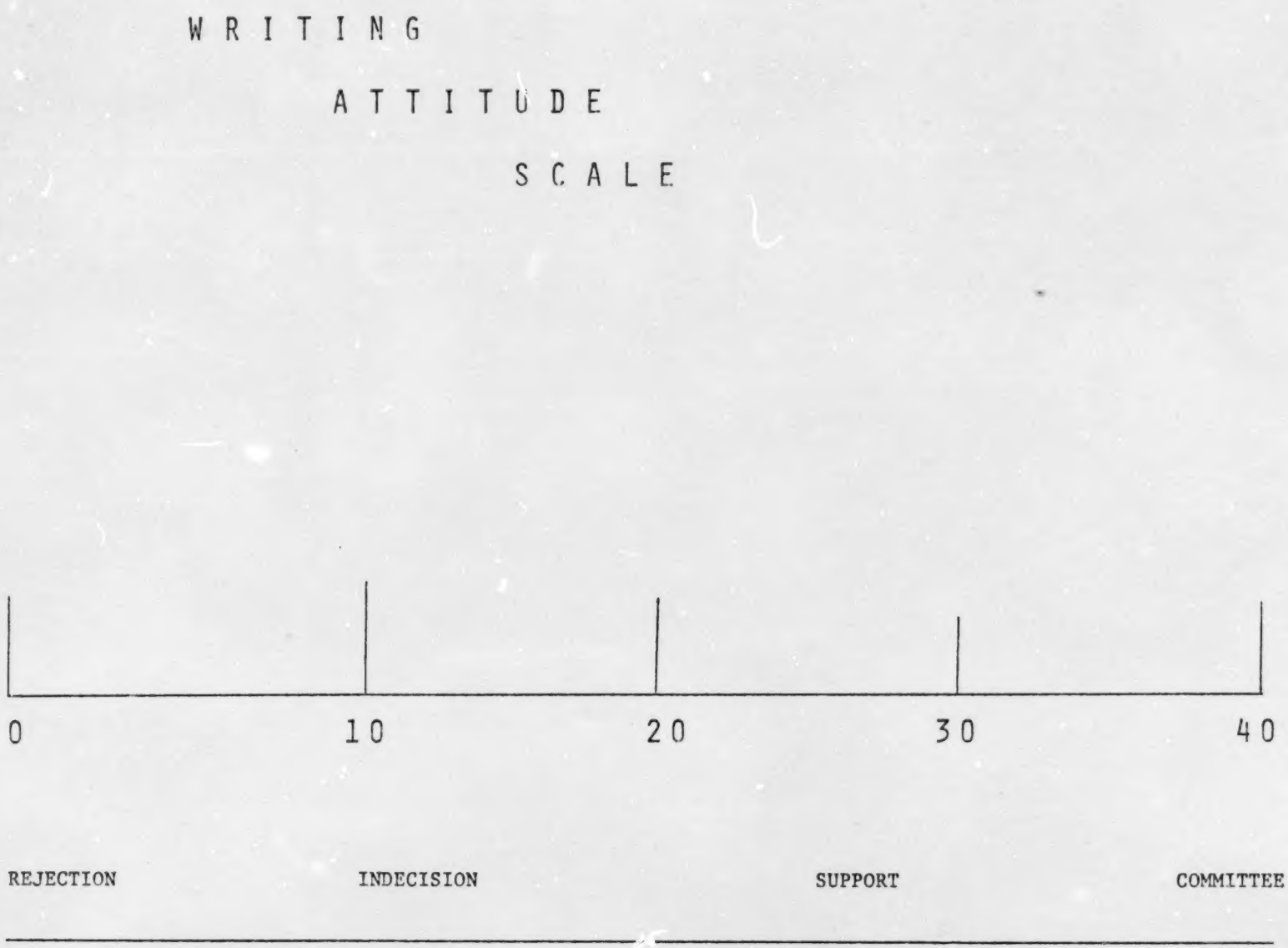

FIGURE 3. Sample Needs Assessment Conducted in Three Departments

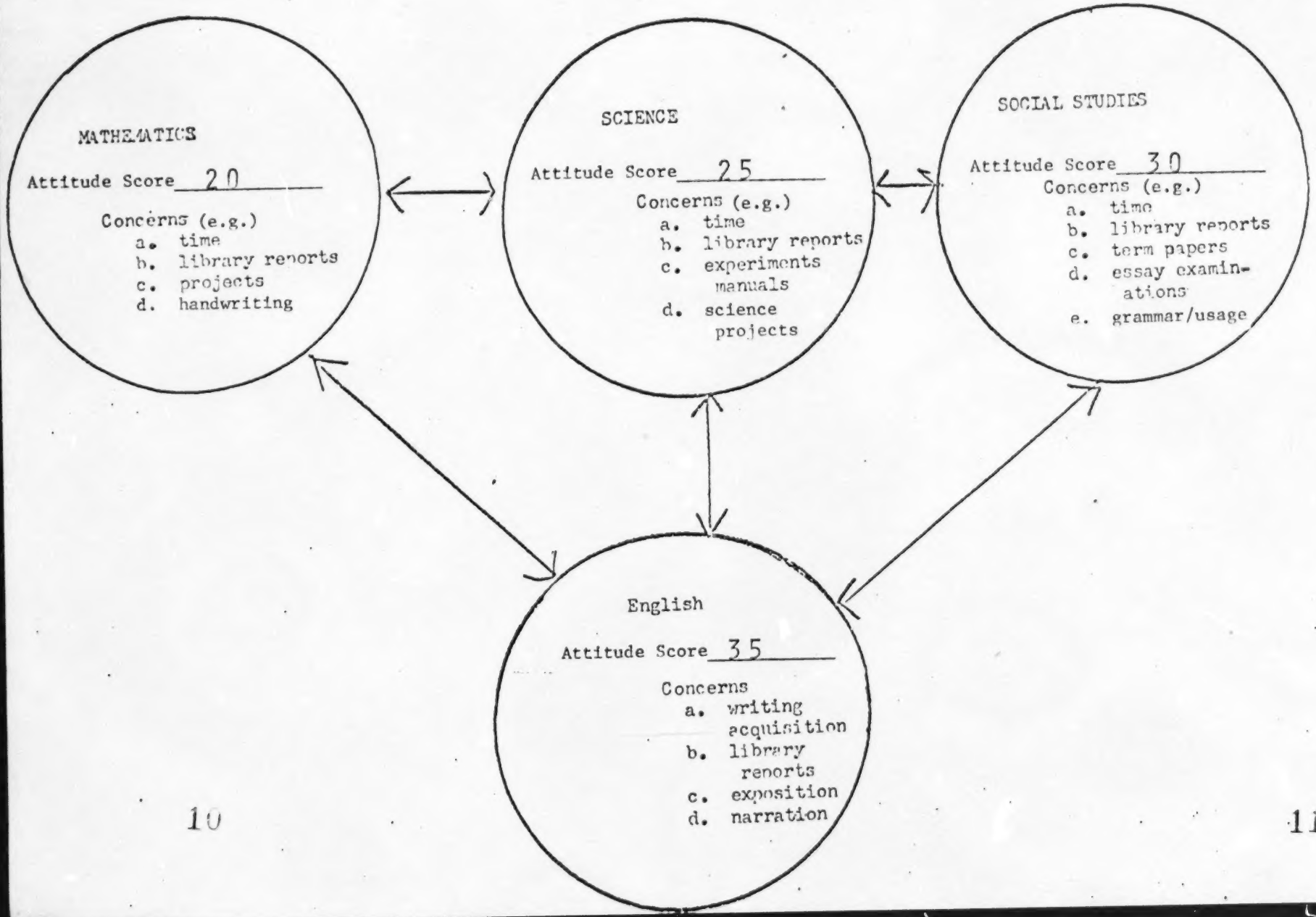

FIGURE 4. Make-up and Concerns of a Writing Committee

WRITING COMMITTEE

Participants

- Science teacher
- Mathematics teacher
- Social studies teacher
- English teacher
- Industrial arts teacher
- Home economics teacher
- Principal
- Counselor or guidance
- Reading teacher

Suggested Directions

- Discuss writing program objectives
- Exchange methods and materials
- Communicate to departments and administration
- Plan curriculum
- Examine textbooks
- Develop minimum standards for writing competence
- Observe classrooms
- Implement classroom demonstration teaching
- Plan inservice programs